

Message Text

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SUBJ: THAI REQUEST FOR INFORMATION REGARDING U.S. INTENTIONS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

1. DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHARTCHAI ASKED DCM TO SEE HIM
URGENTLY JULY 18 TO TRANSMIT REQUEST FOR WASHINGTON'S VIEWS
ON THREE MATTERS OF "HIGHEST IMPORTANCE." CHARTCHAI STRESSED
DURING DISCUSSION THAT HE WAS ACTING ON INSTRUCTIONS OF
PRIME MINISTER WHO ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO U.S. RESPONSE.
FOLLOWING ARE THREE POINTS RAISED BY DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER:

A. WHAT ARE U.S. INTENTIONS REGARDING CAMBODIA
AFTER AUGUST 15? CHARTCHAI LED OFF BY NOTING THAT CAMBODIAN
AMBASSADOR HAD CALLED ON HIM JULY 17 TO INFORM HIM THAT
LON NOL WOULD BE GOING TO UNITED STATES WITHIN NEAR FUTURE
FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT. CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR ALSO EXPRESSED
CONCERN OVER AND SOUGHT RTG VIEWS ON PRESS REPORTS
THAT MOVES MAY BE UNDERWAY WHICH WOULD RESULT IN RETURN OF
SIHANOUK TO POWER IN PHNOM PENH. CHARTCHAI STRESSED TO DCM THAT
RTG ATTACHES GREATEST IMPORTANCE TO SITUATION IN CAMBODIA
SINCE BORDER IS "ONLY TWO HOURS BY ROAD FROM BANGKOK."
IF END OF U.S. BOMBING ON AUGUST 15 RESULTS IN FALL OF PHNOM PENH
AND SEIZURE OF POWER BY KMER INSURGENTS, THIS WILL GRAVELY
AFFECT THAILAND'S SECURITY. IN VIEW OF THEIR PREVIOUS
EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH HIM, THAI WOULD ALSO HAVE SERIOUS
RESERVATIONS ABOUT SIHANOUK'S RETURN. IN THIS CONNECTION,
THAI ARE MUCH INTERESTED IN POSSIBLE MEETING BETWEEN SIHANOUK

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AND KISSINGER IN PEKING. ESSENTIAL THING, CHARTCHAI SAID, IS

TO KWNO U.S. INTENTIONS AND PLANS. THAILAND HAS VITAL INTEREST IN CAMBODIA AND, AS ALLY AND GOOD FRIEND OF U.S., FEELS IT SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO OUR CONFIDENCE.

B. WHAT ARE U.S. INTENTIONS REGARDING FUTURE USE OF AIR BASES IN THAILAND? CHARTCHAI SAID HE IS TRYING, BY PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO EFFECT THAT U.S. USE OF THAI BASES IS "TEMPORARY" AND GEARED TO SITUATION IN INDOCHINA, TO ALLAY CONCERN IN SOME QUARTERS OVER CONTINUED LARGE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE. NONETHELESS, CONCERN IS ON INCREASE AND WILL GROW FURTHER AS AUGUST 15 APPROACHES. RTG DOES NOT WISH TO FORCE US OUT OF BASES BUT BELIEVES IT MOST IMPORTANT THAT WE IMMEDIATELY START DISCUSSION REGARDING FUTURE ROLE OF U.S. FORCES AFTER AUGUST 15 AND ORDERLY REDUCTION IN THEIR NUMBERS.

C. WHAT ARE U.S. PLANS FOR REEQUIPPING THAI ARMED FORCES? CHARTCHAI SAID THAT WHEN U.S. REDUCED OR ELIMINATED ITS TROOPS IN KOREA AND VIETNAM WE UNDERTOOK LARGE-SCALE PROGRAM TO STRENGTHEN THOSE NATIONS' ABILITY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THAILAND IS HIGHLY VULNERABLE AND LIKELY TO BECOME INCREASINGLY SO IN FUTURE CONSIDERING SERIOUS MILITARY SITUATION IN CAMBODIA AND UNCERTAIN POLITICAL FUTURE OF LAOS. THAILAND WOULD LIKE TO START DISCUSSIONS NOW LOOKING TOWARD PROGRAM TO HELI THAI ARMED FORCES IMPROVE THEIR CAPABILITY. DCM DESCRIBED IN SOME DETAIL STEPS WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN ALONG THESE LINES UNDER MAP AND DIFFICULT FUNDING SITUATION IN WASHINGTON. CHARTCHAI INDICATED HIS AWARENESS OF THESE FACTS BUT REITERATED REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL USG RESPONSE REGARDING FUTURE PLANS TO STRENGTHEN THAI ARMED FORCES.

2. IMPORTANCE OF RTG CONCERN REGARDING CAMBODIA IN PARTICULAR IS UNDERScoreD BY PRESS REPORTS JULY 18, WHICH CHARTCHAI CONFIRMED, THAT PRIME MINISTER HAS CANCELLED HIS PLANS TO VISIT INDONESIA AND SINGAPORE IN MID-AUGUST. PRIME MINISTER DOES NOT BELIEVE HE SHOULD LEAVE ON AUGUST 14, CHARTCHAI SAID, WHEN U.S. BOMBING HALT THE NEXT DAY MAY WELL CREATE GRAVE SECURITY PROBLEMS FOR THAILAND.

3. CHARTCHAI'S OFFICIAL DEMARCHE UNDERScores PRESSING NEED TO START DIALOGUE WITH THAI NOW REGARDING U.S. PRESENCE HERE AND OUR
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SHORT AND LONG TERM INTENTIONS IN AREA. THIS IS NEEDED, AMONG OTHER REASONS, TO KEEP INITIATIVE IN OUR HANDS AND IMPROVE CHANCES OF SECURING THAI CONCURRENCE IN OUR REQUIREMENTS NOW AND LATER. BELIEVE IT ESSENTIAL THAT WE START DIALOGUE WITHIN NEXT FEW DAYS REGARDING FUTURE U.S. USE THAI AIR BASES, INCLUDING QUESTION OF ORDERLY AND GRADUAL REDUCTION OF U.S. PRESENCE AT APPROPRIATE TIME. I ALSO BELIEVE WE MUST GO AS FAR AS POSSIBLE TO MEET DESIRE OF PRIME MINISTER FOR BRIEFING ON U.S. VIEWS AND PLANS REGARDING

CAMBODIAN SITUATION.

4. I REALIZE THAT ANY INCREASE IN MILITARY AID WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT BUT BELIEVE WE SHOULD NOT REJECT CHARTCHAI'S REQUEST OUT OF HAND. THAI ARE OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR OWN SECURITY, AND THIS CONCERN WILL INCREASE IF SITUATION IN CAMBODIA SHOULD DETERIORATE OR IF SIHANOUK RETURNS TO POWER. I DO NOT BELIEVE WE CAN CONTINUE TO MEET OUR COMMITMENTS AND PROTECT OUR INTERESTS IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA WITHOUT THE FULL COOPERATION OF A FRIENDLY THAI GOVERNMENT. TO MAINTAIN THIS TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP WE MUST HELP THE THAI WITH THEIR OWN PRESSING NEEDS. I THEREFORE URGE DEPARTMENT AND INTERESTED AGENCIES TO TAKE HARD LOOK AT SITUATION TO SEE WHAT WE MIGHT DO TO ASSIST THAI AND PRESERVE TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO US BOTH IN THIS DIFFICULT PERIOD OF TRANSITION.
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